Necessary Sins – Part 1

Grumbling & Complaining

(Philippians 2:14-15)

Today we’re starting a brand-new message series called "Necessary Sins" as we begin the 40 days leading up to Christ’s Passion week. And my prayer is that we would take this opportunity to open our hearts a little wider and understand the work of Christ a little deeper, so that when Good Friday comes, when resurrection Sunday comes, it’s an opportunity to embrace the grace of God in a deeper and more profound manner.

Now certainly, there are those of you who are wondering what a necessary sin is. And obviously, sin is sin, but we tend to categorize sin into big sins and little sins, and that’s what we want to talk about. It’s that category of sin that we find to be more acceptable, that’s easy to rationalize. Over the next four weeks we’re going to consider these sins from God’s viewpoint, taking the opportunity to contemplate the cost of our sins, the price that Jesus paid for our sin on the cross. And so, we’re going to join David in a prayer recorded in Psalm chapter 139, and this is kind of the backbone of this series as he prays in verse 23 and 24.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalms 139:23-24).

And so, in this series we’re going to look at some of the more ordinary sins that we just rationalize and we’re going to ask God to search our hearts, to see if there is any offensive way in us, because God is pleased when we repent of sinful habits. And not only that, but I think that we’ll find our homes are a much more peaceful as we consider the theme for today’s message. This morning we’re going to talk about grumbling and complaining and I wonder how many of you could honestly say that you’ve heard enough grumbling and complaining?

When it comes to grumbling and complaining, I automatically think about traveling. Whether it’s going to visit family or vacationing with the kids, it doesn’t matter where we’re going or what we’re doing, within 30 minutes of pulling out of the driveway one of them will say, “Are we almost there?” Or “How much longer do we have to go?” Then, once we’ve arrived at our destination, within 30 minutes one of them will say, "How long are we staying here? This is soooo boring." And you know, sometimes it’s all I can do to keep from screaming, because they’re just grumbling about this, complaining about that, and it’s as if there’s just no end to the discontent. So anyway, today we’re going to talk about the problem of grumbling and complaining.

Now, when it comes to grumbling and complaining, ranking right up there with my children, would have to be God’s chosen people, the Israelites. When I think about grumbling and complaining I’m instantly reminded of the people of God in captivity in Egypt. The Old Testament tells us that they were slaves in Egypt for four hundred years and that God heard their groaning, he heard their grumbling and complaining, and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. Now obviously he didn’t forget his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but he came down from heaven, and Exodus chapter 3 tells us that he met Moses, speaking to him from a burning bush and saying,

"I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:7-8).

And so, God commissioned Moses to go to Egypt and tell Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, that God said, “Let my people go.” As you could imagine, that didn’t go over very well with the Pharaoh, but through a series of 10 different miracles God turned the Pharaoh’s heart and he let the people go. However, that wasn’t the end of the story, because no sooner did he let the Israelites go then he had second thoughts; he hardened his heart, he changed his mind, and took off in pursuit of them. But once again, God miraculously delivered them by parting the Red Sea, allowing them to cross through on dry ground before bringing the waves crashing back down on Pharaoh’s army and drowning them.

God then led the Israelites through the wilderness performing miracle after miracle; feeding them with bread from heaven, giving them water from rocks, and neither their clothes nor the sandals on their feet wore out (Deuteronomy 29:5). But guess what God’s people did? They grumbled and complained. In fact, it’s so amazing just how much they remind me of my family on vacation. In Exodus chapter 14, they said to Moses in verse 11,

"Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" (Exodus 14:11-12).

They were grumbling and complaining, muttering under their breath, and honestly it sounds like so many of us today, doesn’t it? But Moses says something that’s very interesting, he challenges them with this question in Exodus chapter 16, he confronts them and says,

“Who are we? You're not grumbling against us, but against the Lord" (Exodus 16:8).

Now, when I read that I was stunned, because what the word of God is telling us is that when we grumble and complain against our circumstances, no matter whether it’s the weather, or against your mother or father, your boss, or your political leaders it’s actually against the Lord.

Moses said, “Your grumbling and complaining is not against us.” He said, “I’m not taking it personal, because it’s against the Lord.” He said they were grumbling against the Lord and I wonder if we saw things through God’s eyes, if we saw our complaints about our circumstances; you know, our griping about our boss, the traffic, the weather, or our President; if we saw that grumbling and complaining through God’s eyes I wonder how that would change our perspective?

And so, what I want to do today is to help you see this through the lens of your own grumbling and complaining. What would it be for you? What is it that you complain about the most? Just think about that for a moment, maybe jot it down there in your bulletin, make a note to yourself, but be honest.

You know, for me it would probably be my calendar, my day planner, because I’m always busy, always looking to the next obligation, the next responsibility, the next event. You know, I’ve got to be here and be there, I’ve got to do this and do that, and at times I find myself grumbling and complaining. You know, “Poor me.”

What is it that you complain about? Some of you complain because you’re not married and others of you complain because you are. Maybe money is tight, or your boss is driving you crazy, it’s raining again, or the Wi-Fi’s too slow? But what I hope you’ll understand is that the problem isn’t your circumstances; the problem isn’t the weather, the problem isn’t with Comcast, the problem is that we’ve taken our eyes off of the goodness of God and focused on ourselves. That’s what leads us to be constantly grumbling and complaining.

I want to share with you a text, a passage of Scripture, written by the apostle Paul, a man whom if there was anyone who had the right to complain it was certainly Paul. But listen to what he says in second Corinthians chapter 11, in verse 23 he starts out with a qualifier, he starts out saying,

“I am out of my mind to talk like this … I’ve worked much harder, been in prison … been flogged … been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received …forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked … I’ve been constantly on the move. I’ve been in danger from rivers …danger from bandits …my own countrymen …and from Gentiles; in danger in the city… in the country… at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I’ve labored and toiled … often gone without sleep… known hunger and thirst … been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak and I don’t feel weak? Who is led into sin and I don’t inwardly burn? If I must boast, I’ll boast of the things that show my weakness…” (2 Cor 11:23-31).

Now, recognize that this is the great apostle and missionary Paul, whose great goal in life was to preach in Rome, because he knew if he could get to Rome, if he could reach the leaders in Rome, he’d be able to impact the whole world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. But what happened is that he got arrested and sent to Rome as a prisoner. His dream was to go to Rome as a preacher, but instead he’s locked up for two years, chained to Roman guards 24 hours a day, awaiting what possibly could be his execution. And so, you could just imagine the temptation to grumble and complain, “God this isn’t fair, I’ve been serving you, I’ve been faithful, and you know how hard the floor is, how bad the food is, and the body odor of these soldiers.” But instead of grumbling and complaining, look at what the apostle Paul wrote in a letter to the church in Philippi. Here’s what he said in Philippians chapter 2:

“Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe” (Philippians 2:14-15).

Now what does he say to do without complaining or arguing? He says, “Do everything” right? Whatever it is, wherever you are, do everything without complaining or arguing. The problem is, that many of us have preconditioned our minds to negativity, because the more complaining that you do, the more your brain becomes accustomed to thinking that way. And so, no matter where you are, or what you’re doing, you’re always going to get what you’re expecting.

That was the problem the Israelites were facing, because they were grumbling and complaining when they were in captivity, they were grumbling and complaining when they were released from slavery, they were grumbling and complaining even though they were free to worship the Lord in the wilderness; and the Bible tells us that’s a very dangerous place to be. And so, what I want to do, what we want to do, is to fix our minds on that which the Bible tells us is helpful. Philippians chapter 4 says,

“Whatever is true… noble… right… pure… lovely… admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things” (Phil 4:8).

And we learn from the apostle Paul; from the way he lived and what he taught, that if you find yourself in a bad situation, in less than desirable circumstances, surrounded by negativity, if it’s within your ability… do something about it.

## Change your circumstances!

If you’re in a bad place and things just aren’t right, God doesn’t call us to go through life pretending like everything’s okay when it’s not. It’s not a sin to notice something that’s not right. It’s not a sin to change your circumstances. But it becomes sin when we grumble and complain about it and don’t ever do anything about it.

In the Old Testament book of Nehemiah, we see this principle, that whenever God wants to get something done, he lays hold of people who are willing to do something about it. Now, in Nehemiah chapter 1, we find Nehemiah serving as cupbearer to the king. He was in the kingdom of Persia, more than 700 miles away from Jerusalem; when he heard in verse three,

“The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." (Nehemiah 1:3).

Now when he heard these things, he was really upset about it, but I want you to notice that he didn’t complain, he didn’t point fingers wondering why someone hadn’t done anything about it. But in verse four he wrote,

“When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven” (Nehemiah 1:4).

He was bothered by it, but he did something about it. When he was in the presence of the king he asked him in chapter 2, verse five,

“Send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it." (Nehemiah 2:5).

Amazingly, he was given approval, authority, and resources to do what he had requested. Nehemiah knew things weren’t right and he did something about it. And today, if there’s something that’s upsetting you, something that’s not right, something that makes you uncomfortable, don’t complain about it. Don’t post comments on your social media. But get up and do something. Change your circumstances.

And then number two, the second thing we can learn from the apostle Paul, is that if you can’t change your circumstances…

## Change your perspective!

If you can do something about it, do something, but if you can’t then change your perspective. Change how you look at it, change how you think about it, and change what you say about it. We see this illustrated so powerfully in the life of the apostle Paul. As I mentioned earlier he’s dreaming of preaching the gospel in Rome, but finds himself chained to a Roman soldier, waiting for what very possibly could be his execution, and he writes to the church in Philippi saying, "But even if ... "

"Even if I'm being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me” (Philippians 2:17-18).

He said, even though my life is being poured out, oozing out day by day, I’m a sacrifice, and that’s why he could say in Romans chapter 12,

“I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1).

You see, it’s a change of perspective. Worship isn't just singing songs, lifting our hands to heaven, but worship is daily offering your life wherever you are, even chained up in a Roman prison, giving yourself as an offering to God. Paul says even if I’m being poured out, each day is an act of worship to God, no matter whether I’m chained to a Roman soldier, because the glory of Jesus is my focus. And so, Paul knew that all was not in vain, that God was working good in a bad situation, and that’s why he could say in Philippians chapter 1,

“What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel” (Philippians 1:12).

And so, he’s not complaining, he’s changed his perspective, because he’s seen the goodness of God in his circumstances. He said, “What’s happened to me wasn’t my plan, it isn’t what I would’ve chosen, but because I can’t change my circumstances, I’m changing my perspective, and as a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ” (Philippians 1:13).

You see, Paul knew that God was working in all things, that’s what he said in Romans chapter 8,

“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

And so, he knew that God was working, he knew that God was doing something, and maybe today you’re in that place that you never would’ve chosen, but you’ve got to recognize that God still has a plan. That no matter what your circumstances, God’s got a purpose, he still has an assignment for you, because we know, Romans chapter 11 tells us,

“God's gifts and his call are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29).

And so, your whatever, your relationship, your job situation, that financial problem or health issue might not be what you’d ever choose, it may not be what you’d ever want, but it doesn’t mean that God can’t use it for your good and his glory. I want to encourage you, that if you can do something about it, do something, but if you can’t change your circumstances, change your perspective. Change how you look at it, change how you think about it, and change what you say about it. Rather than grumbling and complaining about something you can’t change, choose to see God’s purpose, his presence, and his power even in something you never would’ve asked for.

No matter what it is that you’re facing today, you can change the way you look at it, you can change how you think about it, and you can change what you say about it. You’ve got to believe that whatever it is, that God is working it out for your good, that you’ll become more like Christ because of it. You’ll be more dependent on his grace in the middle of it, and you’ll be praying more passionately, your relationship with God will be more intimate, and you’ll have more compassion for others because of what you’ve endured. You can be glad and rejoice because God’s doing something in you.

I love this phrase of Paul’s in Philippians chapter 2. In verse 17 he says,

“Even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you” (Philippians 2:17).

In other words, “Even if my dreams don’t to come pass, even if my days are few, I’m glad and rejoice, because no matter what my circumstances are, I can see the goodness of God. That he's still using me, he's still in me, and he's still working through me.

Now, I don't know what it would be for you. But whatever it is, even if, I still trust the goodness, the character, and the nature of my God. And so, if you can change your circumstances, change them; but if you can’t, change the way you look at them.

Paul changed his perspective and said, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13). And in the same way, we need to remember that it’s all about Jesus, that we were created to bring glory to him, and so no matter what it is that you’re going through, no matter what you’re facing, you need to recognize that Jesus is the main character in the story. And when you change your perspective you can endure anything. You can be a light in the middle of the darkest day. And so, if you can’t change your circumstance, change your perspective. Don’t look at what’s wrong but choose to look at what’s right. Choose to look at the goodness of God. See his grace, his power, his goodness, his forgiveness, and let him carry you so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. The apostle Paul said it this way in second Corinthians,

“That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).

His strength is made perfect in you. And that’s why the psalmist could say in Psalm chapter 150,

“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord” (Psalms 150:6).

Let everything that I am, let everything that I have, give glory to him, because I’m not giving “my whatever” any power by complaining about what it’s not. Instead I’ll look and see what it is, and thank God for it. That's how when Paul was in prison, when his dream was to go to Rome as a preacher and he ended up going to Rome as a prisoner that he could say in Philippians chapter 2

“Do everything without complaining or arguing” (Philippians 2:14).

And so, whatever happens, even though we may not like it, it can be used for the glory of God. Even if my greatest prayer is never answered; even if I never get out of this situation that I wish I wasn’t in, I’ll still praise my God because he’s that good. He’ll never leave me, his presence is always with me, his power is within me, and therefore I will praise him with everything that I have.

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